DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 458 270 TM 033 433

AUTHOR Ediger, Marlow
TITLE Assessing the Social Studies Curriculum.
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Course Content; *Curriculum; Curriculum Development; *Educational Assessment; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Methods; *Social Studies

ABSTRACT

The social studies curriculum should be assessed continuously to bring in the latest research, trends, and recommendations of experts. A survey of teachers, administrators, parents, and other community members may be conducted to determine preferences for the curriculum. An effort should be made to decide what is in the curriculum and what should be included. Some suggestions are made about items that might be included on a questionnaire about the social studies curriculum. A way of determining the scope of the curriculum is to look at the social science disciplines that provide the content for social studies in the schools. Another approach is to look at the 10 themes identified by the National Council for the Social Studies. An additional approach relies on the careful selection of basic textbooks and then expanding this material to emphasize relevance to the students. After the scope of the curriculum has been decided, teachers need to select the objectives for student attainment in terms of knowledge and skills. A variety of evaluation techniques must then be used to find out what students have learned. (Contains 14 references.) (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 458 270

Assessing the Social Studies Curriculum

Marlow Ediger

TM033433

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
M. Ediger
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ASSESSING THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

The social studies curriculum needs to be assessed continuously in order to bring in the latest research, trends, and recommendations into teaching/learning situations. A survey of teachers, school administrators, parents, and lay persons may be conducted to notice preferences. A study first needs to be made of what is to what should be in the social studies. The what should be needs to be inherent in the questionnaire sent to respondents. Each item should be written with clarity and be meaningful to the receivers of the questionnaire. Peers need to review the items to make sure that relevancy and meaning is involved in the questionnaire. If the involved numbers are small, all may respond to the questionnaire. If it is a large group, a random sampling of respondents may be chosen. Which items may then appear on the questionnaire?

Questionnaire Items

After a thorough review if the literature on the teaching of social studies, the following are suggested for inclusion in a questionnaire and can be rated on a five point Likert scale by respondents:

1. a study of history should receive major emphasis in the social studies.

Generally on state mandated tests, history is of primary importance in terms of total test items appearing thereon from the social studies. The question arises as to, should there be rational balance among the social science disciplines appearing on the state mandated test? There are a few states which do not emphasize testing in the social studies. Does this indicate that the social studies is of lesser value as compared to reading and mathematics?

2. geography should receive equal attention in the curriculum as compared to history.

Probably next to history, geography receives secondary emphasis with the total number of test items on state mandated tests. History and geography are interrelated in that historical events occur within a geographical region. It would be extremely difficult to separate history from geography (Ediger, 1995, 7-10).

3. government or political science receives third most emphasis in state social studies mandated tests.

A study of local, state, and federal levels of government are then to be emphasized in the social studies. All civilized societies have some form of government with its rules,

regulations, and laws.

4. a study of culture (anthropology and sociology) should be strongly stressed in the social studies.

Nations and subgroups may differ much from each other in terms of languages spoken, foods eaten, clothing worn, shelter provided, laws in existence, and farming techniques used.

5. economics understandings are salient in the social studies since individuals buy goods and services continually in society.

6. democracy as a way of life should provide major learnings for students.

Here, students would learn about and practice respect for others, human rights, working for the common good, and fairness in life for all in class and in school.

7. problem solving should be practiced in the social studies.

Students need to seek solutions to personal and social problems. They need to identify and seek solutions for these societal problems such as social inequalities among human beings, racism, poverty, crimes against human beings and property, terrorism, hate crimes, and unfair situations.

8. a good current events program needs to be implemented.

Staying updated in news items and happenings is at the heart of a democratic society. Being informed provides possibilities to make quality decisions personally and in the societal arena.

9. skills should receive major emphasis in teaching and learning situations (See Ediger, 2000, 30-37).

How to do something is more important then subject matter to be learned. Skills are needed to develop and use in being able to think clearly and effectively, using reasoning and logic, as well as to do critical and creative thinking.

10. attitudes are very valuable to develop within students toward the social studies as well as in life itself.

Good attitudes toward the self, toward others, and toward society, can make for successful living. Negative attitudes could hinder personal and social development (Ediger, 2001, Chapter One).

The responses, after tabulation, can be separated in terms of how many teachers, administrators, parents, and the lay public gave the highest rating and going on down to the lowest, sequentially, for each of the ten categories listed above. The category receiving the highest numerical average rating from respondents might conceivably receive the most emphasis in teaching and learning situations. The other categories would

also be stressed in the social studies curriculum, according to average ratings received. In item number one above it was stated that state mandated tests could give higher priority to the teaching of history. Respondents may then take into consideration what is stressed in state mandated tests and what is desired in the local school curriculum. What is desired then may well provide the scope of the social studies in the classroom setting. Scope answers the question of what should be taught in the social studies.

One important way of determining scope is to look at the social science disciples which provide content for the social studies. Involved social science disciplines providing subject matter for the social studies then include history, geography, political science, anthropology, sociology, and economics. Psychology and literature might also be brought in, as needed, in teaching the social studies. It is difficult for the social studies teacher to have adequate knowledge of each of these social science disciplines. By working in committees, the social studies teacher may learn from others in evaluating subject matter more thoroughly in terms of which social science discipline is involved when planning and implementing instruction. Perhaps, an historian or other social scientist may meet with the committee at a designated time (Ediger, 1995, 23-28).

During the 1960s, Bruner's writings (Bruner, 1960) were emphasized strongly in the educational literature. His hypothesis stressed "Any subject matter can be learned by any child at any stage of development in some honest intellectual form." Bruner strongly stressed the importance of students learning structural ideas. These key ideas would then be identified by academicians in the social sciences for use in the the social studies. Thus from each academic discipline such as in history, in geography, in political science, in sociology, in anthropology, and in economics, academicians would select, after much deliberation, the structure of knowledge from each social science area. These structural ideas would then be available to teachers for use teaching students. Key ideas, not trivia, would then be provided teachers for teaching/learning situations in the social studies. Even very young children could be taught structural ideas on his/her understanding level. For example, young children could learn about the economic concept of goods by actually seeing, feeling, tasting, hearing, and touching what is known as goods. Thus, a purchased toy is representative of the category goods and can be seen, felt, heard when shaken, and touched. Not all senses may be used such as tasted in this case. But the young

child may still learn about the category of goods in the concrete. Structural ideas, identified by social scientists may then be achieved at any age level in some honest, intellectual form. Social scientists should be heavily involved in determining content for students to learn in the social studies. Bruner also placed a heavy emphasis upon students learning content using methodology of the social scientist (See Ediger,1977, Chapter Eleven).

Obtaining subject matter from social scientists for each academic discipline may seem unrealistic. However, those public schools near to universities may attempt to have their teachers work with professors from each/some of the social science disciplines. This may be a definite possibility in having some ideas for teaching social studies come directly from the academic disciplines. The writer has known social scientists who are very willing to work with public school teachers. In fact, they welcome the idea!

A second approach in determining scope or what should be taught in the social studies might well stress the ten themes identified by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2001):

1. Culture
2. Time, Continuity, and Change
3. People, Places and Environments
4. Individual identity and Development
5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
6. Power, Authority, and Governance
7. Production, Distribution, and Consumption
8. Science, Technology, and Society
9. Global Connections and Interdependence
10. Civic Ideals and Practice

Social studies teachers must discuss the meaning of each theme in depth. With a thorough discussion involving active participation of each social studies teacher, participants might well attach meaning to the different themes. An NCSS web site provides much information pertaining to each of the ten above enumerated themes: http:// www.org/links/home.html. This provides further content for teacher understanding and use in the discussion. Informally, teachers may evaluate and rate each of these topics in terms of worth for classroom use. In this way, the social studies teacher may take the initiative in implementing that which has perceived value. The author recommends strongly that teachers do take these ten themes seriously for

implementation in social studies lessons and units of study.

A third approach in determining scope in the social studies is in the very careful selection of basal textbooks and expanding therein what is necessary to emphasize relevancy for student learning. The ten themes from the above named NCSS publication is one vital suggestion. Other suggested inclusions are the following:

1. a quality current events program using up-to-date, salient news items and events.
2. audio-visual aids which assist students to understand and elaborate in a meaningful way that which is contained in the basal text.
3. library books and other developmental reading materials which emphasize enrichment learning.
4. student/teacher planning of a project directly relating to the ongoing social studies unit of study.
5. contract systems whereby the learner agrees to complete selected activities by a certain due date, signed by the involved student and the teacher (Ediger, 2001, 17-19).

Using a carefully chosen basal social studies textbook has its pros and cons, but much of he criticisms given can be changed by the teacher in that

1. individual differences need adequate provision. One size does not fit all. The basal text needs to be adapted to individual needs and interests.
2. careful attention needs to be given to the new vocabulary introduced in the basal. The teacher needs to be certain that students, with adequate background information, individually can identify each new word correctly and attach related meanings.
3. enrichment activities provide expanded meanings to the content contained in the text.
4. purpose for learning needs to be developed within learners to achieve, grow, and develop.
5. quality sequence for student learning needs to be in the offing (See Ediger, 2001, 79-83).

The unit titles have already been chosen when basals are used in teaching social studies. There is an accompanying manual which provides suggestions for the teacher to use in teaching students in terms of objectives, learning opportunities, and assessment procedures.

Objectives in the Social Studies

After the scope of the social studies has been decided upon, teachers need to select objectives for student attainment. It is good to involve students in the selection of objectives. There are three categories of objectives, basically, for learners to achieve.

Knowledge categories need discreet identification. Vital facts, concepts, and generalizations chosen provide the framework of what students are to achieve in any specific social studies unit. Time and deliberation need to be given in the selection of knowledge ends. Trivia and the insignificant must be avoided. Adequate evaluation of each objective needs to be given by the individual teacher as well as within group endeavors.

Second, skills objectives need to be chosen for students to achieve in the social studies. Skills pertain to students using acquired knowledge in ongoing lessons and units of study. Knowledge might be used in the following situations:

1. to solve problems
2. to assess the worth of what is being accomplished.
3. to enable the student to pursue the next project or activity.
4. to provide background information for reading a given selection.
5. to identify and pursue a project in the social studies.
6. to do a written learning opportunity.
7. to engage in critical and creative thinking.
8. to apply what has been learned.
9. to comprehend ideas in depth.
10. to assess the value of ideas presented such as in brain storming (Ediger, 1979, 23-25).

The social studies teacher needs to emphasize balance among knowledge and skills objectives, as well as in the third category to be discussed, namely attitudinal ends. If students develop quality attitudes, the chances are good that knowledge and skills objectives will be attained. The following attitudinal ends are worthy of consideration by social studies teachers:

1. wanting to learn more about the social studies and its use in society.
2. developing positive attitudes toward having a variety of learning opportunities in the social studies.
3. having good human relations with other students.
4. respecting the thinking of classmates and others in

society.

5. developing interest in learning social studies content.
6. perceiving reasons for learning subject matter and skills in the social studies.
7. volunteering to do extra work in ongoing lessons and units of study.
8. assisting others as needed in the curriculum.
9. developing feelings of being a part of a community of learners.
10. desiring become a life long learner in social studies as well as in the larger social and natural environment (See Ediger, 1994, 26-28).

From the above named ten attitudinal objectives, it is quite evident that each is very important in developing knowledgeable individuals who can do well as citizens in society.

Evaluation of Student Achievement

A variety of evaluation techniques need to be used to find out what students have learned. These must be valid to assess what has been taught. Reliability is a further valuable consideration when appraising student achievement be it test/retest, split half, or alternate forms. The following have been used to ascertain student achievement in the social studies:

1. state mandated tests.
2. classroom tests.
3. teacher observation.
4. self evaluation by the student.
5. student evaluation of their own committee endeavors and progress therein.
6. checklists and rating scales.
7. student choice of how to reveal achievement and progress (See Gardner, 1993).
8. noticing environmental conditions to enhance learning (See Searson and Dunn, 2001).

Each student needs to achieve as optimally as possible in the social studies. It is important to assess each facet of the social studies in its development and maintenance. The social studies is not static but subject to continuous modification and change based on rational thinking.

References

Bruner, Jerome (1960), The Process of Education.

Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, p. 33.

Ediger, Marlow (1995), "Concerns in the Geography Curriculum, Perspectives, 27 (2), 7-10.

Ediger, Marlow and D. Bhaskara Rao, (2001), Teaching Social Studies Successfully. New Delhi, India: Discovery Publishing House, Chapter One.

Ediger, Marlow (1977), "Scope and Sequence in the Curriculum," The Elementary Curriculum -- A Handbook. Kirksville, Missouri: Simpson Publishing Company, Chapter Eleven.

Ediger, Marlow (2000), "Social Studies Children's Literature," College Student Journal, 34 (10), 30-37.

Ediger, Marlow (1995), "Leadership in Curriculum, Education Magazine, nr. 113, pp. 23-27. Published by the Qatar National Commission for Education -- The Middle East.

Ediger, Marlow (2001), "A Project Method," In Focus, 30 (1) 17-19.

Ediger, Marlow (2001), "The School Principal: State Standards Versus Creativity," Journal of Instructional Psychology, 28 (2), 79-83.

Ediger, Marlow (1979), "The Middle East and Unit Teaching," The Intermediate Teacher, 18 (1), 23-25.

Ediger, Marlow (1994), "Human Relations Amidst Change," The Progress of Education, 69 (2), 26-28). Published in India.

Gardner, Howard (1993), Multiple Intelligences: Theory Into Practice. New York: Basic Books.

National Council for the Social Studies (2001), The Curriculum Standards for Social Studies. Washington, DC: NCSS.

Searson, Robert, and Rita Dunn (2001), The Learning Styles Teaching Model," Science and Children, 38 (5), 22-26.